

UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 1

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Subslug: [Article by Marat Zubko: ``The Order Was to Blow Up the Submarine: With Not Only the Crew but Also Nuclear Torpedoes'', and comments of Captain 1st Rank Vazhov on statement by submarine Captain Gushchin, by V. Litovkin]

FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE:

1. [Article by Marat Zubko: ``The Order Was to Blow Up the Submarine: With Not Only the Crew but Also Nuclear Torpedoes'', and comments of Captain 1st Rank Vazhov on statement by submarine Captain Gushchin, by V. Litovkin]

2. [Text] Once again the need arises for us to continue discussion of the subject raised in the article ``The Order Was to Blow Up the Submarine Together With the Crew'' (IZVESTIYA, No 293, 1991). Moreover this occasion is so serious that in our opinion the Russian leadership must intervene, and give the public the complete picture as to what happened to the Soviet submarine U-137, which ran aground in a fjord in southern Sweden in 1981.

3. Let me recall that the article above was written largely on the basis of the recollections of Vasiliy Besedin, the submarine's deputy commander for political affairs, who stated that the crew had been ordered to defend the vessel to the last, and that in the worst case it was to batten down the hatch and blow up the submarine together with the crew. To the question troubling the Swedes, ``Were there nuclear weapons aboard?``, he replied in the negative, although Swedish experts who analyzed water samples asserted the opposite.

4. In a subsequent article, ``Why the Political Deputy Commander Didn't Blow Up Himself and the Submarine'', our newspaper (IZVESTIYA, No 302, 1991) turned the floor over to Captain 2d Rank A. Bulakhtin, former deputy chief of the USSR KGB's special department for the

332

UNCLASSIFIED

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UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 2

Baltic Fleet's submarine unit, who presented a somewhat different version of those events on the basis of his investigation.

5. In his words, there had been no direct order to blow up the submarine, although according to military regulations the crew "should have done everything possible to deny access of unauthorized persons to the unit's territory, and the submarine was a separate unit." Bulakhtin also made a statement that I personally didn't fully understand: "...given the statements of foreign mass media that nuclear weapons were aboard the submarine, only a madman could have given the order to blow it up."

6. It is strange that having conducted an investigation of the incident, when it comes to nuclear weapons he cites the foreign press, as if he himself had seen nothing! But that's not what's important. Here is what remains unclear: The press carried the statements of two witnesses who for some reason offered a different interpretation of the events. And then a third spoke up, painting a picture that would make your hair stand on end.

7. This third person was the former commander of the submarine U-137, Anatoliy Gushchin, a captain 3d rank in the past, and now retired at 45 years. Swedish journalists found him in Estonia and asked him to appear on the popular Robert Ashberg show. And so, here is what Gushchin said:

8. First, the submarine that ran aground under his command in a fjord not far from the Swedish naval base at Karlskrona on 27 October 1981 was carrying nuclear weapons.

9. Second, the command had in fact been ordered to blow up the submarine if need be.

10. Can you imagine? Blow up a submarine with nuclear torpedoes! This means that in those days Europe was on the brink of catastrophe. Who was it that gave such an order? In A. Bulakhtin's words only a madman could have done so. But this means that he did exist, if what the former commander of the submarine said was true.

11. During the program the host of the show tried to find out from A. Gushschin how high the yield of the nuclear weapons was. The captain didn't give exact figures, but he did say that it was high enough to destroy an entire enemy squadron under the right circumstances. And he added that while these nuclear weapons could destroy a harbor, they could hardly destroy entire cities.

12. The Swedes estimated that in such a case the U-137 was carrying 5-10 kiloton tactical nuclear warheads, which is what torpedoes were

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 3

outfitted with them. They recalled for the purposes of comparison that a 13 kiloton bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. And how many total warheads were there aboard the submarine, armed with four torpedoes? There is no answer to this question for the moment.

13. A. Gushchin said that the things he had to endure after that incident you wouldn't even wish upon an enemy. The possibility cannot be excluded that his words are ruled by bad feelings toward the fleet command. Nonetheless, in my opinion his confession should be considered in all seriousness. The Russian leadership, which has inherited the affairs of the Union administration, should conduct a special investigation of the "Odyssey" of the submarine U-137, and tell the truth about whether its commander really did have orders then to blow up the submarine together with not only the crew but the nuclear warheads as well.

14. And what is most important, if such an order existed then, does it still stand today? What would happen if another submarine armed with nuclear torpedoes of a higher yield finds itself in a similar situation?

15. It should also be considered that the Swedish side is also searching increasingly more actively for the truth in this matter. According to assertions in the local press the subject of violations of Sweden's territorial waters by foreign submarines was discussed in a meeting between Prime Minister Karl Bildt [transliteration] and Russian First Vice Premier Gennadiy Burbulis, who was in Stockholm last week.

16. And in the near future a group of Swedish experts will depart for Moscow for talks with Russian authorities; they will also ask questions about the involvement of the navy of the former USSR in invasions of Swedish skerries in the 1980's. According to Stockholm newspapers the group will include Karl Bildt's personal advisors. Time itself will shed light on this affair for the Russian leadership.

17. Another voice also deserving of attention made itself heard simultaneously with Anatoliy Gushchin. A statement was made to the press by Commander Karl Andersson—the same person who negotiated with the crew of the U-137 in behalf of the Swedish Coast Guard, and who was mentioned in the article "The Order Was to Blow Up the Submarine Together With the Crew."

18. After that incident with the U-137, he was virtually turned into a Swedish national hero. He became a unique symbol of the nation's struggle for the inviolability of the country's territorial waters. His appointments to the posts of chief of the naval school and

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 4

commander of the naval base at Karlskrona were reflections of his popularity.

19. But then "national hero" Karl Andersson literally flabbergasted the public. He declared that all of the racket raised over the last 10 years about invasions of Swedish skerries by foreign submarines was simply fantasy, like with flying saucers. The case of the U-137 is of course an exception.

20. "We have not a single shred of evidence of such violations," he noted, "not a single photograph of a foreign submarine. Over 1,200 submarines were sunk during World War II, but in an entire decade of searching we were unable to find even a tiny rivet from a violating vessel. All that the experts have is a photograph of impressions made on the bottom of Khorsh [transliteration] Fjord, but they could have been left by the anchor of some ship."

21. After this statement Swedish television organized a debate between Karl Andersson and Swedish Defense Minister Anders Bjork. The latter asserted that because he had departed from active service, the commander was unacquainted with the latest Coast Guard reports. And the other stated an opinion that should be especially interesting to our readers:

22. "When they changed the buttons on the uniform of Soviet soldiers in Kazakhstan, for example, we knew about it in a couple of months. But although minisubmarines have been operating for so many years, we still don't know where they are made, who makes them or where they come from."

23. The minister parried: We know where they come from, but I can't divulge this fact at the moment. So who's right? We will probably find out only after the archives of the former union ministry of defense are made public. The appropriate documents are stored there, if they exist.

24. If our submariners had in fact been involved in violations, sooner or later this will have to be admitted to us. And if they hadn't been, all the better: We don't need the bad publicity. What is especially important is to know everything about how matters stood then, and stand now, with regard to orders to blow up submarines together with their crews and nuclear torpedoes.

25. Vazhov on Gushchin's Statement, by V. Litovkin

26. The editor's office asked Captain 1st Rank Vladimir Vazhov, chief of the Northwestern Sector of the Main Naval Staff Operations Directorate, to comment on the statement by Anatoliy Gushchin, former

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 5

commander of the submarine U-137.

27. I will leave the captain 3d rank's assertion that an order was received to blow up the submarine to his own conscience. It would be impossible to document the existence of such an order today because no such documents exist in the archives. I can only say as a specialist that the Gushchin had no possibilities for doing so. There could have been only 20 high-explosive grenades aboard the submarine; naturally they could have wrecked considerable havoc, but they couldn't of course have caused the explosion of a 1,350-ton submarine made of especially strong ship steel capable of withstanding a pressure of 25 kilograms per square centimeter.

28. Nor could a torpedo have been exploded, because special safety mechanisms make detonation of a torpedo inside a torpedo tube impossible. And a torpedo tube can't be blown up by an external charge because it is stronger than the ship's hull. Therefore an order to blow up the submarine seems quite unfulfillable to me.

29. I might suppose that Gushchin received instructions to knock out secret equipment—radios, torpedo firing instruments, cryptographic equipment. A grenade would have been enough for that job. But nothing else could have been blown up.

30. Was the submarine carrying a torpedo fitted with a nuclear warhead? Apparently it was. Submarines carried such torpedoes on the Baltic in those days. But even so, the warheads of these torpedoes have their own safeguards against unsanctioned detonation. These safeguards won't fail even if the torpedo itself blows up.

31. In October 1986, during the accident aboard the Soviet submarine in the Atlantic, a missile tipped with a nuclear warhead exploded. The explosion blew off the lid of the missile shaft and ejected part of the missile into the sea, but the warhead didn't operate—its activation was protected by a special code.

32. Then there is one last thing that casts doubt upon the truthfulness of the words of the captain 3d rank. When a submarine is resting on the bottom in shallow water, it makes no sense to blow it up in order to conceal or hide something. All of it would still be there at the surface, and it wouldn't be hard for specialists to reach conclusions about its design and what was in it.

33. Now about the minisubmarines. A great deal of what the newspapers say about them is far-fetched. There were only two of them, built by Leningrad's Admiralteyskoye Association. The decision to build them was made in the early 1980's, and the plan was to make them multipurpose, but the concept failed. Lack of coordination

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 6

between the numerous departments had its effect, the boats wound up too heavy and hard to control, and so construction of more of them had to be abandoned.

34. Their specifications are no secret today. The displacement of such a boat is 219 tons, it is 28 meters long, its speed is six and a half knots, and its range is 240 miles. It has a diesel-electric propulsion unit and an electric motor, and a full battery charge can support 60 miles of subsurface running.

35. There is a crew of three—a commander, a mechanic and a navigator, each of whom can control the boat alone. Its endurance, which is determined by the water and food stores, is 10 days. During trials it did not remain below the surface for more than 24 hours—it had to surface to ventilate the compartments.

36. Diving depth is up to 200 meters. Its armament consists of a device for launching containers. The latter could accommodate a television unit to explore the bottom, apparatus for search and rescue measures, or a mechanical manipulator with which to raise various objects from the bottom and to transfer articles to a submarine in distress. The submarine could also be adapted to lay mines and even accommodate a torpedo tube.

37. Together with the expenses of design and development the boats cost 180 million rubles in old prices. The boats themselves cost around 20 million. This is approximately the cost of two Tu-22 aircraft.

38. During trials they went to sea 170 times, though of course no farther than the Liepaja roadstead and 10 miles from the Paldiski coast. They never went beyond the USSR's territorial waters, such that the suggestion that they may have been in Swedish skerries is devoid of all grounds.

39. The fate of the boats will be this: We will take them up on shore, mothball them, and if we are able to correct their design shortcomings, we will put them back in service. If not, they will remain as museum pieces, as experimental models that could serve as the basis for designing other modifications. In peacetime their use is totally meaningless.

40. These are the things we want to say at the meeting with the delegation of experts from the Swedish Navy, to be held 28 January. We will be visited by Captain 1st Rank Emil Svenson, a naval advisor to the Swedish prime minister, and Captain 2d Rank Nils Uve Yanson [transliterations] from the Swedish Defense Ministry.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Concatenated JPRS Reports, 1992

Document 3 of 12

Page 7

41. I have been appointed leader of the expert group from the Russian Navy. We are prepared to provide our Swedish associates with all information on our activities in Baltic waters. I think that they will have no reason to suspect us of insincerity.

UNCLASSIFIED